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STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE, SIT ROOM
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PARIS ALSO FOR POL
ROME FOR MFO
E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: IS_KMDR MEDIA REACTION REPORT
SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

11. Mideast
12. President Bush Inauguration

Key stories in the media:

All media reported that last night, a Shin Bet agent was killed and seven other security personnel were wounded when a suicide bomber from Hamas blew himself up at the IDF's Orhan outpost at the Katif Bloc junction. A Palestinian passer-by was also wounded. The media reported that earlier on Tuesday, PM Sharon told the IDF commanders in the Gaza Strip to "do whatever it takes" to stop Qassam rocket and mortar attacks at once. Israel Radio reported that Sharon will convene the diplomatic-security cabinet today. All media reported that PA Chairman Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) arrived in the Gaza Strip Tuesday for scheduled meetings with armed factions of Fatah, Hamas and Islamic Jihad. Leading media reported that senior PA officials are pessimistic regarding the success of Abbas's talks. Leading media quoted Fatah sources as saying that the group has reached an agreement with Hamas and Islamic Jihad to stop mortar attacks against Israel proper. Jerusalem Post reported that an initial group of 45 PA security officials is to go to Egypt for security training in February.

Jerusalem Post reported that on Tuesday, Israel accused Hezbollah, Iran, and Syria of being behind the recent wave of terror. The newspaper reported that on Tuesday night, senior GOI officials threatened action "here and elsewhere" against those responsible.

All media reported that at her confirmation hearing before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee Tuesday, Secretary of State-designate Condoleezza Rice reminded

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Israel and the Palestinians of their responsibility at this "moment of opportunity." Leading media quoted NSA Rice as saying that she expects to be deeply involved in efforts to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but that there are no immediate plans to send a special envoy to the Middle East. The media emphasized Rice's comment: "The new Palestinian leadership in word is devoted to fighting terror; it needs to be devoted in deed to fighting terror." She added that the administration had pressed the Palestinians hard to control the militants. Israel Radio reported that NSA Rice warned Syria that it faces new sanctions and "long-term bad relations" with the U.S. because of its suspected interference in Iraq and ties to terrorism. Ha'aretz cited an AP report on the Middle East portion of NSA Rice's testimony.

Israel Radio reported that Palestinians opened fire on IDF troops on the Karni-Netzarim road in the Gaza Strip on Wednesday and fired a mortar shell at a Gaza settlement. There were no casualties. The radio also reported that security forces arrested 13 senior wanted Palestinians in Nablus last night.

All media reported that FM Silvan Shalom has appointed Yehoshua Mor-Yosef, who resigned the day before as spokesman and political secretary and spokesman of the Yesha Council of Jewish Settlements in the Territories, to be his media adviser. The media have recently cited Mor-Yosef's disapproval of the council's active opposition to the disengagement plan and its moderate support for soldiers refusing evacuation orders, which

he said contradicted its formal stance of opposing such actions. A senior Hatzofe columnist criticizes Mor-Yosef's change of mind.

Under the headline, "A Settler Turned Me Into a Cripple," Maariv prominently front-paged the picture of a Border Police officer who became hemiplegic following an injury he sustained last May during the evacuation of an outpost near the settlement of Yitzhar. The officer urges the settlers to restrain themselves; otherwise, "there will be many more like me on both sides."

All media reported that a Knesset committee slammed Israeli banks on Tuesday for "severe negligence" in handling the accounts of thousands of Jews who perished in the Holocaust, the assets of which totaled some 1 billion shekels (USD 230 million).

Leading media reported that the U.S. has imposed economic penalties on several Chinese companies it says helped Iran in its effort to improve its weapons programs.

Yediot reported that President Bush has decided that Vice President Dick Cheney will head the U.S. delegation to the official commemoration of the liberation of the Auschwitz death camp. Former U.S. presidents Jimmy Carter, George H. W. Bush, and Bill Clinton will also be part of the delegation. President Moshe Katsav will head a 200-strong Israeli delegation.

All media reported that the Bach Committee on Senior Civil Service Appointments has endorsed Stanley Fischer's nomination to the post of governor of the Bank of Israel, and that the government is expected to appoint him shortly.

II. Mideast:

Summary:

Senior columnist and chief defense commentator Zeev Schiff wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "Israel's goal should not be cutting off contact with Abu Mazen even before he begins his term in office, but to make him take energetic, quick steps that will win the support of the Palestinian people."

Contributor Dr. Gadi Taub, a Hebrew University lecturer in Israeli society, wrote in mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "What is troubling is that beneath everything that can be dismissed as rhetorical flourish that is geared to meet domestic needs, the issue of the right of return was and remains a principal tenet in [Abbas's] worldview."

Conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized: "Europe ... should not be lecturing Sharon, but telling Abbas that he had better show results quickly or Israel will have no choice but to take drastic steps to provide for its own security."

Nationalist, Orthodox Hatzofe editorialized: "The cunning Abu Mazen is ... most likely to convince the terror organizations to stop striking at the Katif Bloc, Sderot, and so on, in exchange for generous financial aid."

Block Quotes:

II. "No More Killing"

Senior columnist and chief defense commentator Zeev Schiff wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (January 19): "Israel's goal should not be cutting off contact with Abu Mazen even before he begins his term in office, but to make him take energetic, quick steps that will win the support of the Palestinian people. The ambition is not to push the Palestinians into a civil war but to establish, together with them, stability that will enable a cease-fire and diplomatic negotiations.... If the Palestinians and their new leaders want to protect their families, they must help Abu Mazen and the new leadership overcome the madness of the terror and the self-destruction that has infected some Palestinian groups. That is the proper response for the situation now -- measured, and passing the ball over to Abu Mazen and the Palestinian population. There's no way to know if this reaction will work and at what pace, but it is clear that if it fails, the deterioration to the use of far-reaching

means will become inevitable."

II. "Disengagement From the Right of Return"
Contributor Dr. Gadi Taub, a Hebrew University lecturer in Israeli society, wrote in mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (January 19): "It is not Abu Mazen's remarks about the glory of 'shahids,' which recently began to make their way into his statements (for instance, at the annual ceremony commemorating the establishment of Fatah) that are troubling. What is troubling is that beneath everything that can be dismissed as rhetorical flourish that is geared to meet domestic needs, the issue of the right of return was and remains a principal tenet in his worldview.... Time is on the side of those who employ those tactics. Those who are banking on a Palestinian victory by means of demography are not in a rush to get anywhere. On the contrary: they have time for endless talk.... Partitioning the land is the sole means at our disposal to prevent a bi-national state with an Arab majority from evolving, and the disengagement plan must not be made contingent upon the hidden motives of the new 'rais.' Otherwise we could find ourselves negotiating disengagement for another ten years without actually disengaging. That is why Israel must not change its unilaterally established timetable. It needs to make it clear to the Palestinians that we are leaving Gaza. If they want to reach a peaceful settlement before that, good. If not, we will see them from the far side of disengagement, and then we will see. Peace, perhaps not at present. Disengagement in any event, yes."

III. "Asselborn's 'Arafat Excuse'"

Conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized (January 19): "Luxembourg's foreign minister and president of the European Union Council, Jean Asselborn, visiting the region on Tuesday, called for an 'urgent meeting' between Israeli and Palestinian leaders, saying 'I ask Israel to give him [Abbas] a chance.' Earlier, Asselborn reportedly said that 'The 'Arafat excuse' no longer exists ... with Arafat gone the problem of the peace process's dead end disappears.' Thank goodness the word has come down from Luxembourg: our problems are over, if only we would open our eyes and see.... Israel has proved repeatedly that the scope and pace of its military actions are directly related to the terror threats we face. The Palestinian side knows full well that if it stops terror, Israeli military incursions will stop, so long as it is clear that terrorist groups are not using the respite to rearm and reorganize.... Europe, accordingly, should not be lecturing Sharon, but telling Abbas that he had better show results quickly or Israel will have no choice but to take drastic steps to provide for its own security. Asselborn should further tell Abbas that the Palestinians' 'Arafat excuse' is gone: either they stop terror and incitement or their financial and diplomatic honeymoon with Europe will be over."

IV. "An Anticipated Decision"

Nationalist, Orthodox Hatzofe editorialized (January 19): "On the eve of his arrival in the U.S., where he will be welcomed as someone who opposes terror and applauded by both houses of Congress, Abu Mazen had to make the 'bold decision' to fight Hamas and Islamic Jihad. [Palestinian factions] are most likely to exchange fire; some may even be killed and wounded, but all this will happen before and during his trip to the U.S., until the first shipment of money arrives -- from the U.S. and Europe. The cunning Abu Mazen is also most likely to convince the terror organizations to stop striking at the Katif Bloc, Sderot, and so on, in exchange for generous financial aid, while turning a blind eye from the quantity of weapons that will be produced, smuggles and upgraded during the quiet period that Abu Mazen deems necessary."

12. President Bush Inauguration:

Summary:

U.S. expert and Middle East lecturer Professor Eytan Gilboa wrote in mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "In order to earn a good place in history, [Bush] will need to design a policy recognizing the limitations of the U.S. -- actually during an era when it is considered the only superpower."

Chief Economic Editor and senior columnist Sever Plotker wrote in an editorial of Yediot Aharonot: "Only by putting his house -- the U.S. economy -- in order will George Bush succeed in fulfilling his ambitious

plans during his second term."

Block Quotes:

II. "Bush and the World, Chapter Two"

U.S. expert and Middle East lecturer Professor Eytan Gilboa wrote in mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (January 19): "The changes Bush has made in his government cannot herald changes in his policy. What he did was to replace Secretary of State Colin Powell, who opposed his war strategy, with his loyal National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice. He didn't touch the Pentagon leadership, which is responsible for the world war on terror -- and this isn't because he believes the Defense Department staff did a good job. Continued failure in Iraq will certainly cause the replacement of Defense Secretary Rumsfeld and his Deputy Wolfowitz.... The tasks Bush is facing are colossal; in order to fulfill them, he'll need international cooperation, even with hostile and reticent elements such as the UN and the EU. Most paradoxically, in order to earn a good place in history, he will need to design a policy recognizing the limitations of the U.S. -- actually during an era when it is considered the only superpower."

II. "Clouds in America's Skies"

Chief Economic Editor and senior columnist Sever Plotker wrote in an editorial of Yediot Aharonot (January 19): "When he swears to serve the American nation for four more years. George Bush will not only have to fight a phenomenon that dogs U.S. presidents during their second term -- fatigue of the fighting spirit -- but, first of all, to remove the heavy cloud marring all the inaugural ceremonies. That cloud is not the situation in Iraq, but the situation -- economic conditions -- in America itself. The American economy is in a quagmire.... It isn't the American taxpayer who pays for the U.S. Government's huge deficits, but China's central bank, which buys hundreds of billions of dollars in U.S. bonds. This is an absurd and dangerous dependence: the world superpower will cease to be a power if it continues to live above its means and to rely upon the whims of foreign capital.... Only by putting his house -- the U.S. economy -- in order will George Bush succeed in fulfilling his ambitious plans during his second term."

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